CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Mid Rivers Telephone Buried Communication Telecommunication Line South Ekalaka Exchange ROW Easement Request
Proposed Implementation Date:	2014
Proponent:	Mid Rivers Telephone Coop
Location:	T1N-R55E-Sec 36, T1N-R56E-Sec 36, T1N-R57E-Sec 36, T1S-R58E-Sec 7 & 18,
County:	Carter County

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Mid-Rivers Telephone has requested a right of way easement from the DNRC Eastern Land Office. This easement is for the purpose of placing an underground fiber optic telecommunication line across the mentioned tract of Trust Land to replace existing copper lines. This line will provide for a communications service link between the outlying areas of Carter County. The route of the line will follow the existing county road/phone line corridor with a few alterations for terrain difficulties.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:
Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.

Mid Rivers Telephone has requested that the DNRC issue a right of way easement for telecommunication line mentioned above across these state owned sections. Mid Rivers has submitted a DS-406A easement request form for utilities to the DNRC Eastern Land Office The total length of the cable installation will be approximately 24315 feet in length with a requested width of 16 feet. The total acreage requested is 8.94 acres

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

None

3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

Alternative A- Allow the proponent an easement for buried communication line requested
Alternative B- No Action.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:
Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify any cumulative impacts to soils.

Alternative A- Disturbance of the soil will occur through the use of the plow trench construction method. This method creates a minimal disturbance to the site which can recover quickly given normal growing conditions. There should be no lasting adverse effects to the soil quality, stability or moisture. Most of the soil structures are not fragile or unstable. The area of impact will be following the existing copper line route. Minimal Impact expected.

Alternative B-No Impact

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify cumulative effects to water resources.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced? Identify air quality regulations or zones (e.g. Class I air shed) the project would influence. Identify cumulative effects to air quality.

Alternative A- Pollutants and Particulates may be increased during the construction of the project. After the completion of the project pollutant and particulate levels should return to normal. Increase in pollutants during construction should be almost negligible. Minimal impacts expected.

Alternative B- No Impact

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify cumulative effects to vegetation.

Alternative A- Where the construction takes place there may be disturbance to the vegetation cover. This impact should be minimal and the vegetation make-up should recover quickly. Mid-Rivers will be required to reseed the site with a native seed mixture after the completion of the project. The Eastern Land Office should be contacted to give the seed mixture and rate of application. There is no evidence of rare plants or cover types in the scope of the project. Current plant species which occupy the construction area include Western Wheatgrass (Agropyron Smithii), Green Needlegrass (Stipa Viridula), Bluebunch Wheatgrass (Agropyron Spicatum), Prairie Sandreed (Calamovilfa longifolia),Little Bluestem (Schizachyrium Scoparium), Needle and Thread (Stipa comata), Prairie Junegrass (Koleria pyramidata), Blue Grama (Bouteloua gracilis), Big Sagebrush (Artemisia tridentata), Silver Sagebrush (Artemisia cana), Fringed Sagewort (Artemisia frigida), Broom Snakeweed (Gutierrezia sarothrae), Smooth Brome (Bromus inermis), Crested Wheatgrass (Agropyron cristatum), Downy Brome (Bromus tectorum) and Japanese Brome (Bromus japonicus).

Alternative B- No Impact

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

Alternative A-There should minimal effect on any animal habitats within the boundaries of the project construction. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed during the construction of the project. After completion of the project there should be no permanent impact to these species.

Alternative B- No Impact

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

Alternative A- A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Database showed that three sensitive species of bird have been noted in the general project area. These species include Brown Creeper (Certhia Americana), Long Billed Curlew (Numenius americanus), and Loggerhead Shrike (Lunius ludovicanus). The proposed project should not have any long term effects on habitat or food sources for these species. Due to the small scope and short time frame of disturbance during the project no significant impact to these species is expected.
Alternative B- No Impact

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

Alternative A-Upon inspection of the parcels by the Eastern Land Office staff no significant findings were noted on these parcels. A search of the TLMS database shows no recorded sites or site leads on this project. Due to the small scope and previous disturbance of the project no impacts are expected.
Alternative B- No Impact

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Alternative A-Mid Rivers Telephone will need to be able to perform maintenance on the communication line from time to time. This should not be a significant impact. Any aesthetic degradation will only be temporary until the site recovers. Mid-Rivers will be required to reseed the site with a native seed mixture after the completion of the project. The Eastern Land Office should be contacted to give the seed mixture and rate of application. Some above ground telephone pedestals and marker poles may be required to be placed on trust land within the requested right of way easement. Marker poles and pedestals are typically no more than 36 inches tall and sparsely located on the line.
Alternative B- No Impact

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify cumulative effects to environmental resources.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

None

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Alternative A- There may be risks to human health and safety in the construction of the project, but this should be done by qualified professionals. Safety concerns become minimal for work done in this fashion. Minimal impacts expected.
Alternative B- There may be less communication availability and reliability in these remote rural area. This could lead to safety and emergency problems. Impacts expected.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Alternative A- It should have a positive effect on Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production. Minimal impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to the employment market.

Alternative A- This project has the potential to create jobs with further development possibilities. The amount of jobs if any is not known at this time.
Alternative B- No Impact

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

Alternative A- No Impact expected

Alternative B- No Impact

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify cumulative effects to population and housing.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Alternative A- No Impacts expected

Alternative B- No Impact

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Alternative A- This may provide income for the trust in the form of the purchase of a right of way easement. The cost of these 5 easements will be set at $2682.00 or $300.00 per acre.

Alternative B- No Impact

EA Checklist Prepared By:	Name: Scott Aye	Date: 2-4-2014
	Title: Land Use Specialist	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Alternative A

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

The granting of the requested easements upon state owned trust lands for the proposed fiber optic phone/communication line installation should not result in nor cause significant environmental impacts. The predicted environmental impacts have been identified and mitigation measures addressed in the environmental assessment checklist. The predicted impacts will be adequately mitigated through the construction and reclamation plans. The proposed action satisfies the trusts fiduciary mandate and ensures the long term productivity of the land. An environmental assessment checklist is the appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	Name: Chris Pileski	
	Title: ELO Area Manager	
Signature: /s/ Chris Pileski		**Date**: 2-4-14